Interfacing IK with other knowledges in the knowledge economy: A case of blending modern knowledge and ancestral wisdom in the South African 'knowledge society'

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Abstract
Although indigenous knowledge (IK) is significant to the development of South African indigenous peoples the preservation of its social memory is fast disappearing. In the emerging global knowledge economy, prominence is given to the 'knowledge society' that promotes universal approaches to knowledge production and understanding. A voluminous body of literature has emerged which asserts that indigenous knowledge cannot be verified by scientific methodologies nor that science could be adequately assessed according to the tenets of indigenous knowledge systems. This body of literature reports that most of these traditional knowledge systems are not documented. Consequently, the indigenous peoples of South Africa have abandoned their traditional ways of doing things or, alternatively, are seeking to rediscover ancient wisdoms as foundations for pathways to the future. This article explores the South African indigenous peoples' worldview and the beliefs they hold in their attempt to survive in the 21st century. It also provides a perspective on how indigenous knowledge can be preserved and transformed orally and examined its interaction with social capital for the purposes of community development. The argument presented in this article is that indigenous knowledge is often reflected in the belief systems of the community.

1. Introduction

'Knowledge societies' are a burgeoning revolution of the 21st century. In the emerging global knowledge economy, any country's ability to construct and mobilise its knowledge capital is significant — and equally critical is the country's ability to sustain development and the availability of physical and fiscal capital. Indigenous knowledge is the basic component and backbone of any country's knowledge system. It encompasses the skills, experiences and insights of people, applied to maintain or improve their livelihood (World Bank, 1998a).

According to Moahi (2007:03), this burgeoning revolution in information and communication technologies has enthused what is now commonly referred to as the knowledge economy. The basis of this knowledge economy is that we live in a world where the major currency is information and knowledge just as much, if not more than capital and land. Considering that whoever has access to information and knowledge and uses it effectively can expect to develop and generate wealth, Moahi further argues that globalisation has commoditised and privatised knowledge, resulting in the knowledge economy. Her major argument is that developing nations are not progressing because they do not have access to knowledge that they would use to improve production and generate wealth.

Notwithstanding the above assertions, an increasing number of African governments and international development agencies are recognising that local-level knowledge and organisations provide the foundation for participatory approaches to development that are both cost effective and sustainable. African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) are increasingly being seen as a crucial tool for sustainable development and community livelihoods in the region and on the African continent.

At present many traditional knowledge systems are endangered because of rapidly changing natural environments and fast-paced economic, political, and cultural changes on a global scale. It is clear that indigenous knowledge is still upheld and protected by the elders of the community. In South Africa, indigenous pupils attending Model C schools do not understand what indigenous knowledge is. It is only in communities that are still considered to be highly traditional that transfer of indigenous knowledge takes place. With the former group, not much of that knowledge is being transferred to the younger generation because of the various challenges brought about by 'modernity'. One could argue that 'modernisation' has certainly presented a different viewpoint on life. Modernisation places an acute emphasis on the individual rather than on collective success. Essentially one could argue that the 'traditional' social capital that ensured solidarity among the indigenous peoples has collapsed with the emergence of the burgeoning insurgency in capitalism. This includes the need for education and money as the foundation of all the activities that people engage in for survival. Practices disappear as the indigenous peoples of South Africa abandon their traditional ways of doing things, and think that these traditional practices are inappropriate for the new challenges they face. They may adapt too slowly or, on the other hand, rediscover ancient wisdoms as foundations for pathways to the future. However, many practices fall away only because of the intrusion of foreign technologies or development concepts that promise short-term gains or solutions to problems without being able to be sustained (World Bank, 1998b).

Indigenous peoples' knowledge of their temporal and social space is what the social scientist understands as IK. The term is mooted by the World Bank (1998a) and it states that most authors agree with the notion of what indigenous knowledge is and consequently draw the same conclusions in a number of aspects. Warren (1991a:192) and Flavier, de Jesus and Navarro (1995) fit the profile and present their typical definitions as follows:

Indigenous knowledge (IK) is the local knowledge — knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society. IK contrasts with the international knowledge system generated by universities, research institutions and private firms. It is the basis for local-level decision making in agriculture, healthcare, food preparation, education, natural resource management, and a host of other activities in rural communities (Warren 1991a:192).

Indigenous Knowledge is [...] the information base for a society, which facilitates communication and decision making. Indigenous information systems are dynamic, and are continually influenced by internal creativity and experimentation as well as by contact with external systems (Flavier et al. 1995:479).

Warren (1991a:192) restricts his explanation to include the local knowledge and donates that indigenous knowledge is unique to a given culture or society. Flavier et al. (1995:479) extend the definition to include information on the process of decision making and
perceive it as an information base for a society to facilitate communication. Unlike other authors, Ntuli (2001:50) uses a similar definition but his conclusions are rather controversial and he defy words it as follows:

- knowledge that was received from other sources outside the original which has been assimilated and integrated into the indigenous to the point that it has become part of the collective heritage.

Many writers on indigenous knowledge agree that it also encompasses 'non-technical insights, wisdom, ideas, perceptions and innovative capabilities' (Thrupp 1989:139 in Agrawal 1995:4). Brouwer (1998) discusses the two fundamental aspects of indigenous knowledge, namely Indigenous knowledge as a cognitive facilitator of development, and indigenous knowledge as technological praxis. These aforementioned writers conceive that indigenous knowledge is the knowledge, ideas and practices that are peculiar to a particular community and symbolises the community's identity and ways of surviving while maintaining the environment they find themselves in. Indigenous knowledge is the sum total of the knowledge and skills that people in a particular geographical area possess, enabling them to get the most out of their natural environment. Indigenous knowledge is a way of life, based on the experience of the individual and of the community, as well as knowledge passed down from one's elders. Indigenous knowledge is used at the local level by communities in developing countries as the basis for decision making pertaining to food security, human and animal health, education, natural resource management and other vital activities. The development of indigenous knowledge, covering all aspects of life, including management of the natural environment, has been a matter of survival for the indigenous peoples who generated this knowledge. Indigenous knowledge innovates from within and also internalises, uses and adapts external knowledge to suit the local situation.

It is clear from the above discussion that indigenous knowledge is knowledge that has been created and developed over a period of time. Indigenous knowledge represents generations of creative thoughts and actions within a particular community in an ecosystem generated to keep abreast of the ever-changing agri-ecological and socio-economic environment (Kamiti & Mphahlele 2002:17). It may, therefore, be seen as the sum total of the knowledge and skills of the inhabitants of a certain geographical area. These skills and knowledge have been shared for generations and have been adapted by every new generation to meet its unique requirements and environmental conditions.

As mentioned previously, indigenous knowledge is developed and adapted continuously to gradually changing environments and passed down from generation to generation and closely intertwined with people's cultural values. Although indigenous knowledge cannot be verified by scientific criteria nor can science be adequately assessed according to the tenets of indigenous knowledge, it is also viewed as a non-scientific body of knowledge that enables people to address their diverse ills (challenges) in society. Sometimes the two paradigms are built on distinctive philosophies, methodologies, and criteria. While there is considerable debate around their relative merits, contests about the validities of the two systems tend to serve as distractions from explorations of the interface, and the subsequent opportunities for creating new knowledge that reflects the dual persuasions.

In South Africa, indigenous knowledge is marginalised in education because it is seen as non-scientific and non-engaging in formal education; however, indigenous knowledge transfer is becoming an increasingly important issue in the development fraternity as development practitioners seek answers to develop indigenous communities. This position of marginalising indigenous knowledge in education by the South African government is described by Heugh (2009:176) as follows:

South Africa, however, opted for a Western, globalisation-adjusted model for language education. Although it espouses a commitment to additive bilingual education, implementation is predominantly via an English Second Language (ESL) curriculum.

Alussia, Kamikwera, Birungi, Akam, Allguna and Barwogeza (2007:2) mention that indigenous knowledge is stored in people's memories and activities. It is expressed in stories, songs, folklore, proverbs, dances, myths, cultural values, beliefs, rituals, community laws, local languages and taxonomy, agricultural practices, equipment, materials, plant species and animal breeds.

Ntuli (2001:50) asserts that indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) counter hegemonic discourse in the context of the African Renaissance. Most authors of our times agree with Ntuli's assertion. One of these authors is Odora Hoppers (2002:9) as she calls for a re-evaluation of modern and traditional knowledge systems. The term IKS delineates a cognitive structure in which theories and perceptions of nature and culture are conceptualised. It includes definitions, classifications and concepts of the physical, natural, social, economic and ideational environments.

This article explores the South African indigenous peoples' worldview and the beliefs they hold in their attempt to survive in the 21st century. The article will, therefore, attempt to describe how indigenous knowledge could be preserved and transferred orally and its interaction with social capital discussed for the purposes of community development. The argument presented in this paper is that an indigenous knowledge system is often reflected in the belief systems of that community. Thus, this paper seeks to establish whether by blending the two paradigms the global knowledge economy (modern knowledge) and ancestral wisdom could lead to human and sustainable development among the indigenous peoples of South Africa.

2. Orientation towards indigenous knowledge (IKS) in South Africa

A policy on IKS in South Africa has been developed from the earlier work of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Arts, Culture, Science and Technology. The government of the Republic of South Africa registered its commitment to the recognition, promotion, development, protection and affirmation of IKS. The Indigenous Knowledge
Systems (IKS) Policy that was adopted by cabinet in November 2004 is an enabling framework to stimulate and strengthen the contribution of indigenous knowledge to social and economic development in South Africa. The main IKS policy drivers in the South African context include the following:

- The affirmation of African cultural values in the face of globalisation — a clear imperative given the need to promote a positive African identity.
- Practical measures for the development of services provided by IKS holders and practitioners, with a particular focus on traditional medicine, but also including areas such as agriculture, indigenous languages and folklore.
- Underpinning the contribution of indigenous knowledge to the economy — the role of indigenous knowledge in employment and wealth creation; and interfaces with other knowledge systems. For example, indigenous knowledge is used together with modern biotechnology in the pharmaceutical sector and other sectors to increase the rate of innovation (DST 2004:5).

While the policy states that it will provide 'a basis upon which indigenous knowledge can be used to make more appropriate interventions' (DST 2004:3), it also affirms African cultural values in the face of globalisation. As in the case of all policies in South Africa, there is a divergence between South Africa's policy on the one hand, and its practices on the other. This does not mean that there are no success stories about which to boast. In other sectors of indigenous knowledge systems of South Africa there are pockets of excellence. The government of the day has undone itself. Here and there, there are areas that still need attention. The educational sector is one of them. The Republic of South Africa faces enormous educational challenges such as how to devise curricula that will reflect the aspirations, needs and history of the entire population, and how to provide for the continuing education of the many young people who were never exposed to indigenous knowledge throughout their lives.

The policy document links ideas such as 'competitiveness' and 'economic growth' to the Indigenous Knowledge Systems without problematising these concepts. It states that the growth-enhancing effects of the Indigenous Knowledge Systems remain minimal while simultaneously supporting the misconception that the Indigenous Knowledge Systems are static (DST 2004:14). The policy document underlines the importance of creating incentive mechanisms to gear the Indigenous Knowledge Systems more towards economic growth while, on the other hand, underlining the sustainability of indigenous knowledge in many communities in South Africa without taking cognisance of other alternatives beyond the economic consideration.

As already mentioned indigenous knowledge is unique to a given culture or society and hence it is location and culture specific. More often than not indigenous knowledge is local, but it need not be traditional as knowledge is always in the making (Brouwer 1998:27). This knowledge is constantly being adapted to the changing environment of each community and will remain current as long as people use it. Thus, IK is dynamic, as new knowledge is continuously added to it. The recent rapid technological advancements have created conditions for the invasion and extraction of natural resources from the ecologically fragile territories of the indigenous people. The difference between indigenous knowledge and an Indigenous Knowledge System is important. In this context, Vanclay (1984) and Hastrup (1993:173) recognise the difference between knowing and understanding or between 'an intimate and implicit native knowledge, and external and explicit expert understanding' (Hastrup 1993:175). We are all natives in some world of a defined temporal and social space.

Several development initiatives now contain, at least, references to indigenous knowledge, because that knowledge system is available as a community's own heritage and it is cheaper, proven to be effective, and could link local and national interests as well as be blended with outside knowledge. Blending modern knowledge and ancestral wisdom, however, requires a systems approach because indigenous knowledge is more complex than the simple and linear formats that they have been reduced to in scholastic pursuits, such as traditional healing, cattle grazing, animal husbandry, and cropping systems.

As much as indigenous knowledge is unique to a given community and culture, it is dynamic and based on innovation and practical experiment. It is also called local knowledge or traditional knowledge and stands in strong contrast to Western, scientific and modern knowledge that is continuously being developed by research institutions and universities. Although it has not always been made tangible, certain groups do reveal this knowledge and convey it in a tangible way through, among other things, tales, poems, indigenous laws, traditions and environmental values (Thakadu 1997:90). According to the World Bank (1999b), indigenous knowledge has the following characteristics:

- It is local, because it is anchored in a specific community, established within the boundaries of broader cultural traditions and developed by a specific community.
- It is intangible knowledge and consequently not as easily codified.
- It is conveyed orally.
- It is experiential knowledge rather than theoretical knowledge.
- It is learned by repetition.
- It changes continuously, is created and recreated, discovered and lost, even though outsiders consider it to be static.

However, Odora-Hoppers (2002:9) warns that:

... the idea of indigenous knowledge is not just about woven baskets, handicraft for tourists or traditional dances per se. Rather, it is about excavating the technologies behind those practices and artifacts: the looms, textile, jewellery and brass-work manufacture; exploring indigenous technological knowledge in agriculture, fishing, forest resource exploitation, atmospheric and climatological knowledge and management techniques; indigenous learning and knowledge transmission systems; architecture; medicine and pharmacology; and recasting the possibilities they represent in a context of democratic, equitable participation for community, national and global development in real time.
The conclusion drawn here is that the main characteristic of indigenous knowledge is that it is mainly conveyed orally and is thus largely undocumented.

3. Indigenous knowledge and the South African indigenous people’s worldview

Indigenous knowledge has often been dismissed as being unsystematic and incapable of meeting the productivity needs of the modern world, and that it is not systematically documented. The oral, rural and allegedly ‘powerless’ nature of indigenous knowledge has made it largely invisible to the development community and to global science. It is, however, essential that the South African indigenous knowledge systems be understood in relation to a worldview which is to a large extent realised in religious ceremonies, rituals and other practices. Even though aspects other than religious practices are linked to indigenous cultural practices, religion and religious practices are central to any indigenous peoples’ epistemologies in South Africa.

Indigenous knowledge is part of the lives of the rural poor; their livelihood depends almost entirely on specific skills and knowledge essential for their survival.

This paper focuses only on one sector of indigenous knowledge (i.e. articulation of oral knowledge and its transmission). South African culture is rich in narrative and literature that draws on ancestral wisdom. This critical point is raised by Van Damme and Neluvhalani (2004:364). Both argue that the indigenous ways of knowing through articulation as ‘knowledge’ have been reduced to mere object and rhetoric.

There are two main categories in the worldview of an African. Chivauro (2005:217) states it aptly as follows:

They are the physical and the spiritual...The differences between African and European worldviews concerning earth and heaven relate to differences in their attitudes towards the material and the spiritual. Africans regard them as compatible...The danger of adopting the European worldview to solve African problems is therefore obvious. It is hostile to our worldview and our idea of development. African development can only be truly achieved through an African worldview.

Arguing that indigenous cultures and traditions explore spiritual connections between people and their environments through language, thought, prayer, ritual, art and other everyday activities, Godoka (2000:72) states: ‘learning about the nature of the spirit in relationship to community and the environment is considered central to learning the full meaning of life’ (Godoka 2000:73). In the spiritual field the ancestors play an important role and are guarantors that the social and moral world will not collapse and that the solidarity of the group will still maintained. The holistic nature of the interrelationship between nature, human beings and the supernatural is foundational in the African knowledge system. Sillitoe (2000:4) views indigenous knowledge as a field that is often flexible, adaptable and innovative and within this context African worldviews and wisdom look like myth and superstitious metaphysics.

Ellen and Harris (1996) confirm that indigenous knowledge is inherited in oral form from past generations, and is transmitted orally through imitation and demonstration. They assert that they never use IK inherited in documented formats and buttress this notion with previous studies. Thus the indigenous knowledge is embodied in the following aspects:

- beliefs
- medicine
- knowledge, etc

This paper will focus on only two of these components, namely beliefs and knowledge.

4. Beliefs in indigenous knowledge contrasted with modern Western ideas about knowledge

A community’s indigenous knowledge is often reflected in the beliefs based on their religion and/or culture. For example, many South African communities believe that the slaughtering of cattle, goats and sheep is an act of symbolic cleansing. If the community’s life, or the life of an individual, does not run according to expectations, it can be ceremonially cleansed through the slaughter of an animal. Animals are slaughtered during marriage ceremonies to ensure a prosperous and happy marriage. A community’s indigenous knowledge is often reflected in its cultural beliefs and these often manifest themselves in cultural taboos.

Some indigenous people believe that when one sees the deceased, especially if they are one’s relatives, it is not a paranormal eventuality at all but a common occurrence by ancestors who are trying to communicate with their people. However, this is regarded as an unfortunate occurrence. To counter such incidents the indigenous people hold a belief that by sprinkling a pinch of snuff and traditional beer on the ground these people or spirits will be made to disappear. After the traditional rituals have been performed with the assistance of the elders (depending on the ethnic group) the unhappy spirits will ultimately cross over.

5. Cultural taboos

A community’s indigenous knowledge is often reflected in its cultural beliefs, for example the transporting of salt from one household to another at night is considered a taboo. The indigenous people of South Africa hold the belief that salt is not supposed to be transported at night. They believe that something sinister might happen to the person carrying it. This belief is not implausible as it resonates with the account in the Bible of Lot’s wife being turned into a pillar of salt.
To avert danger, girls are discouraged from sweeping outside their homes at night especially in rural areas where the light is often poor. In rural areas creepy crawlies such as scorpions and snakes may present a danger to them.

Young unmarried teenage girls are discouraged from eating food with a high protein intake, for example milk, the yellow of an egg and liver. These foods are fattening and the elders believe that a sudden change in a woman's body shape could cause a very young girl to look older than her real age and so attract older men. Ancestral wisdom is very beneficial in these accounts.

Engaged women, especially those who enjoy cooking, are discouraged from eating food out of a pot, because it is believed that at their wedding celebration there will be a downpour of rain and guests will not enjoy themselves. Another popular belief held among Sotho-speaking indigenous people concerning food is that food that accidentally falls to the floor signifies that a hungry person is about to visit.

Indigenous people believe that certain tangible and concrete symbols have supernatural qualities, and modern communities interpret them as premonitions. These symbols are mysterious and hard to explain but most indigenous peoples of South Africa hold beliefs about them. These may be portrayed by means of animate or inanimate objects.

5.1. Insects

In Northern Sotho, a bee buzzing in a room signifies a person of a certain standing in the community is coming to visit. He/she may be of royal blood. The indigenous people believe that a straight line of red ants crossing a doorstep and/or pathway around a house is a forewarning of the death of a close family member.

5.2. Animals

The continual barking of a dog may foretell the death of a close member of the family. Some indigenous people of South Africa hold the belief that a cat may house the spirit of a deceased person or that a dying person's spirit could enter a cat. The cat would appear to the unsuspecting loved ones of the one who is on the verge of passing on.

5.3. Body parts

A ringing sensation in the ear may indicate that someone is speaking about you, whereas tingling in the feet may mean that one will embark on a long journey in the future. A tingle in the palm of the hand may signify financial luck and fortune. A recurring twitch at the bottom of the left eye may signify that something hurtful is about to happen and the person experiencing this occurrence may end up sobbing hysterically. But a recurring twitch at the bottom of the right eye may symbolise that you may see someone whom you have not seen for a long time. A funny feeling in the stomach (in isiZulu this is called isibeletho) may be a sign to warn a mother/parent about something awful that is about to happen to his/her

offspring. The indigenous people associate this feeling mostly with mothers. In Western cultures this is called a gut feeling or intuition. The former feeling is very emotional and extremely intense and cannot in any circumstances be equated with a gut feeling. One’s conscious mind informs one that something is wrong but one cannot explain to anyone what one is feeling at that particular moment.

What distinguishes knowledge from other forms of belief is that its holders explain, or are apparently at least capable of explaining, why indigenous communities hold the belief that they hold to be true. By extension, the culturally distinctive feature of a pattern of knowledge networking, as opposed to other forms of networking, would seem to be the (expected) presence of moderately deep meta-discourses on why some things are believed to be true and others not. Such meta-discourses are present in every culture. These are practices that socially engender knowledge creation.

Considerable contributions to global knowledge have originated from indigenous people, for instance from doctors and veterinarians with their intimate understanding of their environments. Indigenous knowledge is developed and adapted continuously to gradually changing environments and passed down from generation to generation and is closely interwoven with people’s cultural values. Indigenous knowledge is also the social capital of the poor, their main asset for investing in the struggle for survival, to produce food, to provide for shelter or to achieve control of their own lives.

6. Resource conservation and utilisation through indigenous knowledge

Providentially the situation has changed, and in the last decade there has been volatile growth in the number of publications on the relevance of indigenous knowledge. Consequently, a rapidly growing set of evidence indicates a strong relationship between indigenous knowledge and sustainable development. Interest in the contribution of indigenous knowledge to a better understanding of sustainable development was brought about by the UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992. The World Conference on Science (Budapest, 1999) recommended that scientific and traditional knowledge be integrated in interdisciplinary projects dealing with links between culture, environment and development in areas such as the conservation of biological diversity management of natural resources, understanding of natural hazards and mitigation of their impact. The value of indigenous knowledge is increasingly recognised, especially in the context of the management of resources. Each community has a number of socio-cultural practices for resource management. These contribute significantly towards ensuring the long-term sustainability of resources.

Eriksen (2007) and Briggs et al. (2007) have observed that as people’s needs and values change, together with the nature of the resources at their disposal, indigenous knowledge is reworked and adapted to new environments. Others portray indigenous knowledge as ostensibly unchanging, timeless, and rooted in localities.
If to educate is 'to draw out', then the paradox is that it is not only in the sense of 'to draw away' (i.e. to lead forth from current experience and understanding to new knowledge and skills), but also in the sense of 'to draw forth' (i.e. to bring out the experience, understanding, knowledge and skills already there). It is this paradoxical challenge which (indigenous) multilingual education must meet if it is to realise the possibilities it promises.

7. Indigenous knowledge management transfer systems across generations

History has taught us that the survival of civilisations is based on the passing on of knowledge and skills which enable the continuity of that legacy. If there are no proper channels to pass on the knowledge then traditions will be lost (Kabudi 2003). It is, therefore, apparent that there is a need for a popular mechanism that will enhance the transfer of knowledge in this community. To enhance the standard of living of the indigenous people of South Africa, it would be useful to explore ways in which indigenous knowledge systems could be revived in the search for effective but low-cost technologies. The World Bank (1998b) explains that sharing indigenous knowledge within and across communities can help enhance cross-cultural understanding and promote the cultural dimension of development. The main stumbling block for the harnessing of indigenous knowledge seems to be the disinterest and indifference shown by the younger generation to anything 'traditional'. Even the aversion they have towards their indigenous languages is highly discouraging. Accordingly, there is a need to popularise or market indigenous knowledge in all public spaces of South Africa. Obviously, the starting point would be the implementation of the national policy regarding indigenous knowledge. The willingness to learn can only be achieved through marketing of the indigenous ‘traditional’ knowledge to the communities. This in turn will hopefully spur an interest among community members to be holders of ‘traditional’ knowledge (Nwaka 2004).

Nevertheless, one could still argue that in this community a tension is evident between the ‘traditional’ and the ‘modern’. On the face of it, it seems as if the Western culture is overpowering the ‘traditional’ culture. This becomes clearer especially if one considers that all things associated with development are generally ‘modern’. The systems that have been in place thus encourage the internalisation of Western knowledge as opposed to indigenous knowledge, such as ‘modern’ schooling. One would also want to question the fact that even today the elders continue to be the sole carriers of indigenous knowledge. Why is it that there are no young people who want to be associated with indigenous knowledge? It could be that the young people take no interest in indigenous knowledge systems because they are sidelined in most of their activities as they are in the school syllabus. ‘Modern-day’ school subjects are far more highly valued than indigenous Knowledge Systems. Policy makers interested in indigenous knowledge systems should place more emphasis on ways of integrating indigenous knowledge systems into the ‘modern’ school curriculum.

The preservation, protection and promotion of the indigenous knowledge, innovations and practices of local and indigenous communities is of key importance for developing countries. Their rich endowment of indigenous knowledge and biodiversity plays a critical role in their healthcare, food security, culture, religion, identity, environment, sustainable development and trade. This is particularly crucial for the most vulnerable segments of their societies and for indigenous peoples worldwide.

8. Indigenous knowledge for development

Foreign knowledge does not necessarily mean modern technology. It also includes indigenous practices developed and applied under similar conditions elsewhere. These techniques are then likely to be adopted more quickly and applied more successfully. To foster such a transfer a sound understanding of indigenous knowledge is needed. This requires means for the capture and validation, as well as for the eventual exchange, transfer and dissemination of indigenous knowledge. As emerges from the above discussion, IKS emphasises the importance of people having a collective responsibility towards others and that they be in union with their environment and nature. Stead and Watson (2006) emphasise indigenisation as ‘the process of taking development from elsewhere and introducing modifications to make it fit the new culture. Therefore, different perspectives can enrich each other while several approaches in Western psychology and African perspectives have nodes of correspondence. There are similarities that may contribute to the convergence of Western and African psychological practices.

Indigenous knowledge is relevant at three levels for the development process. It is, obviously, most important for the local community in which the bearers of such knowledge live and produce. Secondly, development agents, NGOs, governments, donors, local leaders, and private sector initiatives need to recognise it, value it and appreciate it in their interaction with the local communities. Before incorporating it in their approaches, they need to understand it and critically validate it against the usefulness for their intended objectives.

Lastly, indigenous knowledge forms part of the global knowledge. In this context, it has a value and relevance in itself. Indigenous knowledge can be preserved, transferred, or adopted and adapted elsewhere.

The development process interacts with indigenous knowledge. When designing or implementing development programmes or projects, three scenarios can be observed:

1. The development strategy either:
   - relies entirely or substantially on indigenous knowledge
   - overrides indigenous knowledge, or
   - incorporates indigenous knowledge

Planners and implementers need to decide in which path to follow. Rational conclusions are based on determining whether indigenous knowledge would contribute to solving existing problems and achieving the intended objectives. In most cases, a careful amalgamation of
indigenous and foreign knowledge would be most promising, leaving the choice, the rate and the degree of adoption and adaptation to the clients.

9. Conclusion

Indigenous knowledge is not yet fully utilized in the development process. Conventional approaches imply that development processes always require technology transfers from locations that are perceived as more advanced. This has often led to overlooking the potential in local experiences and practices. Blending together modern knowledge and ancestral wisdom, however, requires a systems approach because indigenous knowledge is more complex than the simple and linear formats that they have been reduced to in scholastic pursuits, such as traditional healing, cattle grazing and animal husbandry, or the cropping system.

Rural African communities, from the time of our ancestors, have been greatly endowed with 'special' knowledge with which activities were carried out and notable progress was made. Notwithstanding, people fail to realize the efficacy of the 'special' knowledge - in the enhancement of sustainable development. This traditional knowledge has not been properly mainstreamed into development projects, especially African countries. Unfortunately, most African countries are plagued by widespread poverty, epidemics, political unrest, economic instability, terrorism and corruption. Efforts were made by many in different quarters, externally and internally, to set Africa free from these 'development devourers'. Yet, Africa suffers underdevelopment from generation to generation.

10. References


Performance in folklore and the reclamation of indigenous knowledge systems through oral traditions

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Abstract

The article investigates the relationship between orality and literacy with special reference to the changing cultural patterns of transmission of traditional folktales as a performing art. It goes on to explore how the performative effect is impacted upon by reducing them to written forms. Orality as indigenous knowledge, just like any historical inquiry, is a hallmark of human society. Folklore has, therefore, been ensuring that the transmission of African cultural values with all its historical connotations was in vogue since time immemorial. It addresses socio-political and psycho-cultural problems by virtue of their (folktales) didactics. Folklore, in this article, will be broadly defined to include not only verbal art or orature, but also to encompass those fields dealing on folk culture, ethnology and mythology (Msimang 2002:11). Folktales are a product of culture and upholding the performative cultural heritage of a country is an important component of its people’s national identity. The article argues that folktales should be given their rightful place as an embodiment of the performing arts to revive African cultural identity.

1. Introduction

The article’s main focus is to assess the theatrical effect brought about by reducing folktales to written forms. An attempt will be made to establish whether this effect in the performing nature of folktales is positive or negative. Folktales, as part of orature, are still an existing form of art which according to Msimang (1986:1) ‘expand and uphold certain [African] norms and values which form the cultural framework in which the novelists cast their compositions’. The main thrust of undertaking this research is the realisation that theatre as a performing art is part of the African people’s culture. No little wonder why Msimang (1986:2) ‘maintains that a fair assessment of a work of art is the one that takes cognisance of the cultural context which is reflected in such a work’. Culture connects different things to different people. It is the totality of a people’s way of life which includes both material aspects, as Andal (cited in Mbalango, 2004:37) succinctly puts it:

Culture embraces all the material and non-material expressions of a people as well as the processes with which the expressions are communicated. It has to do with all the social, ethical, intellectual, scientific, artistic and technological expressions and processes of a people usually ethically and/or nationally or supra-nationally related, and usually living in a geographically contiguous area, what they pass on to their successors and how these are passed on.

Fanon (1963) rightfully observes that culture, encapsulated in indigenous knowledge systems, involves people’s ways and means by which they confront their present day-to-day realities and their ever-necessary survival strategies. When folktales are reduced to writing, according to Fanon (1963:224), these ‘traditions are fundamentally unstable and